Transitions are important to children’s learning routines, says K-State expert

‘Fit and Healthy Kids’ helps caregivers maximize early childhood learning

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Some changes in life are not so easy.

But for young children, recognizing transitions between their daily activities is an important part to their growth.

“Let’s start with our routines,” said Tristen Cope, a family and consumer sciences agent with K-State Research and Extension’s office in Marion County. “Routines are important to adults as well as young children because they provide a sense of security and give children control over their environment. Routines help children learn what to expect at different times of the day, and in return feel pride and satisfaction when they can participate and perform those routines with the independence they have.”

Cope teaches a lesson on transitions between activities as part of the national curriculum, Fit and Healthy Kids, which combines the resources of four land grant universities and the Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral program.

Transitions, she says, help children recognize that one activity is ending and another is about to begin.

“One of my favorite ways to give transitions in an early childhood classroom is dimming a light, if you have one,” Cope said. “Or, you could sing a song, give a verbal warning, or you can even play an instrument.

“If you use a light switch, for example, then every time you dim those lights, the children know you have something important to say or that a transition (in their daily routine) is about to happen.”

To further illustrate her point, Cope sang a song:

*Tick-tock, Tick-tock goes the clock
Try to be as still as a rock.*
One-Two-Three…

“And then,” she said, “you would go into cleaning your classroom.”

Transitions could also include skipping, playing a freeze game, engaging in a different movement (such as tip-toeing or slow motion walking) or a calm activity (such as yoga) before naptime. Adults – including teachers or daycare providers – can include children in creating transitions.

“We want to give children the opportunity to engage in something they appreciate, that they value,” Cope said. “When they're able to find a connection to something they value, and which gives them a sense of security, they're going to feel more comfortable in your classroom or environment and engage in deeper learning.”

Cope noted that not everything works for every classroom or childcare situation. “We have to find out what works for us,” she said. “We want to find something that will fit the children in your care.”

More information and resources to help families, teachers and other caregivers are available online at https://fitandhealthykids.unl.edu.

“A child’s brain is going to thrive on repetition,” Cope said. “When we are able to have our daily routines and they become consistent, the child will feel more secure and more self-sufficient, and they will engage in deeper play.”

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Fit and Healthy Kids, https://fitandhealthykids.unl.edu

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